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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000057

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SUBJECT: USEB 34: FM ZEBARI HERALDS NEW ERA FOR IRAQ

CLASSIFIED BY AMB. JOHN D. NEGROPONTE FOR 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

1. (C) IRAQI FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI TOLD THE AMBASSADOR JULY 4 THAT THE NEW INTERIM IRAQI GOVERNMENT (IIG) MUST DEMONSTRATE ITS INDEPENDENCE AND SHOW THE IRAQI PEOPLE THAT THE TRANSFER OF POWER WAS GENUINE. HE HOPED DISBURSEMENT OF U.S. SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDS WOULD BE ACCELERATED AND SAID THAT STABILITY AND SECURITY HAD IMPROVED IN AREAS WHERE SUPPLEMENTAL MONEY HAD ALREADY BEEN SPENT. ZEBARI WAS PLEASED WITH HIS TRIP TO THE NATO SUMMIT IN ISTANBUL AND WELCOMED THE FINAL OUTCOME. HE TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN IRAQ AND ITS NEIGHBORS WERE DIFFICULT, AND SPECIFICALLY MENTIONED THE RELATIONSHIP WITH SYRIA AS PROBLEMATIC. REGARDING ELECTIONS, ZEBARI ARGUED PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION WOULD BE THE SAVIOR FOR IRAQ WHILE A WINNER-TAKE-ALL SYSTEM WOULD SOW THE SEEDS FOR CIVIL WAR. END SUMMARY.

TRANSFER OF SOVEREIGNTY

2. (C) AMBASSADOR NEGROPONTE MET JULY 4 WITH FOREIGN MINISTER ZEBARI AS AN INITIAL COURTESY CALL. ZEBARI WAS POSITIVE ABOUT THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND AND JOKED WITH THE AMBASSADOR THAT IF HE BELIEVED ONLY THE MEDIA'S INTERPRETATION OF THE STATE OF AFFAIRS, HE WOULD TRY TO SEEK POLITICAL ASYLUM ABROAD. THE MINISTER UNDERLINED THE IMPORTANCE OF PROVING TO THE IRAQI PEOPLE THAT THE TRANSFER OF SOVEREIGNTY WAS GENUINE AND CREDIBLE. HE ASSURED THE AMBASSADOR THAT IRAQ AND THE UNITED STATES WERE ON THE SAME TEAM BUT SAID THE IIG WOULD NEED TO SHOW ITS INDEPENDENCE.

3. (C) SADDAM HUSSEIN'S ARRAIGNMENT WAS A SUCCESSFUL DEMONSTRATION OF LEADERSHIP BY THE IIG, ACCORDING TO ZEBARI. HE SAID THAT ALTHOUGH SOME COLLEAGUES HAD RESERVATIONS THAT SADDAM WOULD USE THE OCCASION TO HIS ADVANTAGE, ZEBARI WAS CONVINCED THE HEARING HUMILIATED SADDAM AND "SENT THE RIGHT MESSAGE" TO THE IRAQI PUBLIC.

4. (C) REGARDING THE MEDIA, THE MINISTER SAID THE IIG WOULD NEED TO MANAGE "ITS MESSAGE" AND PUSH MORE OFFICIALS FORWARD TO SPEAK WITH THE PRESS. ZEBARI SAID THAT IT WAS PREDOMINANTLY CPA OFFICIALS WHO INTERFACED WITH THE MEDIA FOR THE PAST YEAR. THE AMBASSADOR AGREED WITH ZEBARI AND NOTED THAT HE HAD NOT ONCE SPOKEN TO THE PRESS IN THE PAST FIVE DAYS. THE AMBASSADOR EMPHASIZED THAT THE USG WANTED TO TAKE A LOWER PROFILE AND SUPPORT THE NEW IRAQI GOVERNMENT HOWEVER POSSIBLE. THE AMBASSADOR OFFERED TRAINING FOR IRAQI PRESS OFFICERS. ZEBARI WELCOMED THE OFFER.

5. (C) ZEBARI TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE WAS "PUTTING THE FINAL TOUCHES" ON HIS LIST OF 47 CHIEFS OF MISSION TO BE SENT ABROAD, INCLUDING TO WASHINGTON AND NEW YORK. HE SAID THE LIST WOULD BE FINALIZED WITHIN THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS.

U.S. ASSISTANCE

6. (C) ZEBARI EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER THE SLOW PACE OF U.S. SUPPLEMENTAL FUND DISBURSEMENTS. HE URGED THE AMBASSADOR TO QUICKEN THE PACE AND NOTED THAT IN AREAS WHERE THE USG HAD BEGUN

PROJECTS, LIKE IN TIKRIT, THE SECURITY SITUATION HAD SHOWN MARKED IMPROVEMENT. THE AMBASSADOR TOLD ZEBARI THAT A LARGER PERCENTAGE OF THE SUPPLEMENTAL HAD ACTUALLY BEEN COMMITTED THAN THE MEDIA PORTRAYED, BUT HE AGREED WITH ZEBARI THAT FUNDS NEEDED TO FLOW AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

¶17. (C) ZEBARI TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HIS TRIP TO ISTANBUL FOR THE NATO SUMMIT WAS A SUCCESS. HE WAS PLEASED WITH HIS OPPORTUNITIES TO MEET OTHER FOREIGN AND DEFENSE MINISTERS TO CONVEY THE MESSAGE THAT IRAQ NEEDED SUPPORT, SPECIFICALLY TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT. THE FRENCH DELEGATION HAD QUESTIONED ZEBARI AS TO HOW GENUINE AND REPRESENTATIONAL THE POLITICAL PROCESS IN IRAQ WAS. THE MINISTER TOLD THE AMBASSADOR HE WELCOMED THE FRENCH QUESTIONS AS IT GAVE HIM AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLAIN THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY. [NOTE: THE FRENCH CHARGE IN BAGHDAD HAS YET TO SUBMIT HIS CREDENTIALS. HOWEVER, THE CHARGE ENCOURAGED ZEBARI TO WRITE A LETTER TO THE FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER REQUESTING THAT DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BE RE-ESTABLISHED. HE SAID THE FRENCH SIDE WOULD RESPOND QUICKLY IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. END NOTE.]

¶18. (C) ZEBARI HAD TRAVELED TO ISTANBUL ONE WEEK PRIOR TO THE NATO SUMMIT FOR AN ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC CONFERENCES (OIC) MEETING. HE ALSO VIEWED THIS MEETING AS A SUCCESS AND WAS PLEASED WITH THE OIC FINAL RESOLUTION, WHICH SUPPORTED THE IIG AND UNSCR 1546. DURING THE OIC MINISTERIAL, SRSG BRAHIMI SAID THE MEETING WAS GOOD AND HE LOOKED FORWARD TO THE NEXT SUCH GATHERING, WHICH EGYPT PLANNED TO HOST IN LATE JULY.

¶19. (C) THE MINISTER CHARACTERIZED RELATIONS BETWEEN IRAQ AND ITS NEIGHBORS AS DIFFICULT. ZEBARI SPECIFICALLY RAISED THE ISSUE OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS ENTERING IRAQ FROM SYRIA AND IRAN. HE WOULD NOT ACCUSE EITHER GOVERNMENT OF AN OFFICIAL POLICY TO SEND FOREIGN FIGHTERS, BUT ZEBARI TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT BOTH DAMASCUS AND TEHRAN COULD CERTAINLY DO MORE TO STOP IT.

¶110. (C) WHENEVER ZEBARI RAISED THE ISSUE WITH HIS SYRIAN INTERLOCUTORS, THEY WOULD ASK ZEBARI FOR EVIDENCE OF SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT. THE MINISTER TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT EVIDENCE EXISTED; SYRIAN MEDIA "AGITATED" THE SITUATION AND FOREIGN FIGHTERS WITH SYRIAN IDENTIFICATION PAPERS HAD BEEN CAUGHT IN IRAQ. FURTHERMORE, ZEBARI REPORTED THAT FORMER IRAQI BAQATH PARTY MEMBERS AND INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS WERE IN SYRIA ORGANIZING ACTIVITIES TO UNDERMINE THE IIG. ZEBARI SAID THE IIG WAS EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITY OF CLOSING THE BORDER WITH SYRIA, BUT NOTED THE SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC IMPACT IT WOULD HAVE ON IRAQ.

¶111. (C) ACCORDING TO ZEBARI, SAUDI ARABIA AND TO A LESSER EXTENT EGYPT WERE SYMPATHETIC TO THE SYRIAN POSITION. ANOTHER ARAB FOREIGN MINISTER HAD TOLD ZEBARI THAT IRAQI FREEDOM QTERRIFIEDQ SYRIA, IRAN, AND OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE REGION.

ELECTIONS

¶112. (C) THE AMBASSADOR TOLD ZEBARI THAT UN OFFICIALS PLANNED TO RETURN TO IRAQ SHORTLY, BOTH TO HELP WITH THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND TO WORK ON ELECTION PREPARATIONS. REGARDING ELECTIONS, ZEBARI ARGUED THAT PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION WAS QTHE ONLY SAVIORQ FOR IRAQ. PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION WOULD LEAD TO NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND QVERY LIVELYQ ALLIANCES BETWEEN ETHNIC AND SECTARIAN GROUPS. ZEBARI CONTINUED THAT A WINNER-TAKE-ALL SYSTEM WOULD LEAD TO LARGE POLITICAL BLOCS FORMING AND POSSIBLE CIVIL WAR. HE SAID THAT IF THE SHIQA WON AN OUTRIGHT MAJORITY THROUGH PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION Q "SO BE IT." THE AMBASSADOR SAID THAT SOME PEOPLE HAD EXPRESSED FEARS THAT PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION WOULD LEAD TO ISLAMIC EXTREMIST DOMINATION. ZEBARI DISCOUNTED THOSE FEARS.

¶113. (C) THE AMBASSADOR THANKED ZEBARI FOR SHARING HIS THOUGHTS ON ELECTIONS, AND AGREED THAT WHEN IRAQ DRAFTED ITS CONSTITUTION, IT WOULD BE IMPORTANT FOR THE ALL VOICES, EVEN THOSE OF SMALL MINORITIES, TO BE HEARD. A SYSTEM OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SHOULD ALLOW FOR THAT OPPORTUNITY.

